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Necessity and Possibility: The Logical Strategy of Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'

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Introduction

Kant's Conception of Logic



Agents—specifically, human beings—think, and they do so in accordance with *rules*. Saul Kripke's provocative interpretation of Wittgenstein has inspired a rather large literature around the very question of what it would even mean to follow a rule. Yet well before considering that well-known, and vexing, difficulty, it is of some use to determine the precise (if only purported) function of a given rule, as well as its modal "status," in order to see if any application of that rule can be justified: in Kant's language, to establish the scope and limits of a rule and, in turn, a *set* of rules. For Kant, such a set of rules, ranging over a specified domain, can indeed be identified, articulated, and justified—if only through a demanding process of philosophical reflection. That set of rules, again relative to a specific domain, qualifies as a *logic*. It is along these lines that Kant presents his conception of general, or universal (*allgemeine*) logic.

Agents also judge, and if Kant is right, they do so in accordance with rules. Here, the specified domain—possible experience—introduces an element foreign to general logic, but the fundamental insight remains the same. One can identify, articulate, and justify (again through philosophical reflection) a set of rules relative to the domain. For Kant, the justified application of those rules within the legitimate

Table 1. Structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*

I.	Transcendental Doctrine of Elements	(pp. 17–704)
A.	Transcendental Aesthetic	(pp. 19–49)
B.	Transcendental Logic	(pp. 50–704)
B.1.	Transcendental Analytic	(pp. 64–292)
B.2.	Transcendental Dialectic	(pp. 293–704)
II.	Transcendental Doctrine of Method	(pp. 705–856)

Note: Page numbers refer to the first ("A") edition of 1781.

domain of possible experience constitutes Transcendental Analytic; their illegitimate application constitutes Transcendental Dialectic. Taken together, Transcendental Analytic and Transcendental Dialectic constitute Transcendental Logic.

By looking at the structure of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, one immediately sees that the vast majority of the text is devoted to Transcendental Logic. If one excludes the introductory material and the important, but relatively neglected, Transcendental Doctrine of Method, the remaining text consists of the radically disproportionate halves of the Transcendental Doctrine of Elements (see table 1).

Clearly enough, Kant seeks to exploit the analogy between such a conception of logic, *qua* "a logic of possible experience," and the more traditional conception of formal or general logic, which he calls "universal" or "general" (*allgemeine*) logic, although, as we will eventually see, *identifying* general logic with traditional or contemporary conceptions of formal or symbolic logic is problematic. Logic, in its analytic moment, establishes and justifies these rules; the illegitimate application of these rules gives rise to dialectic. The complex modal structure of Kant's strategy should also be noted here. When general logic is said to provide a set of rules that range necessarily over a specified domain, that domain is to be regarded as *possible* thought; similarly, the domain for transcendental analytic is *possible* experience. Consequently,

transcendental analytic would constitute a set of universal and necessary rules for the possibility of experience; as the point has been usefully characterized, Kant is interested in showing the "necessity of a possibility."¹ If Kant is correct, then, just as we can determine (reflectively) what rules are necessary for the possibility of thought, we can reflect on experience to determine that a certain set of conditions (rules, presuppositions) must be satisfied for that experience to be possible.

The following discussion seeks to explore and, it is hoped, illuminate the analogy Kant draws between general and transcendental logic. It will be argued that this analogy, which both structures the *Critique of Pure Reason* and drives many of its arguments, yields a position that is immoderate, yet modest. Undoubtedly, the philosophical view in question is immoderate, in that Kant characterizes the concepts and principles it delineates as, among other things, irrevisable, incorrigible, indubitable, necessary, universal, infallible, and certain. At the same time, its results are modest, in that what Kant attempts to articulate in the *Critique* merely establishes the scope and limits of the application of rules, relative to a given domain, leaving, for example, specific epistemic claims to be examined in light of the "fruitful bathos of experience."² In this way, I hope to provide an interpretation of Kant's Critical philosophy that not only demonstrates his strategy to put legitimate metaphysical inquiry on a firm basis, but also reveals why many of the original hopes of philosophy—the aims of applying pure reason, without critical reflection—"we may have to give up as futile" (Bvii). These results, I believe, will also reinforce the notion that, fundamentally, Kant's views appeal to a conception of "common-sense" that was popular in his day and that continues to endure, a result that

1. H. J. de Vleeschauwer, *La déduction transcendentale dans l'oeuvre de Kant* (Paris: Leroux, 1934–37), 3:101; K. Reich, "Die Vollständigkeit der kantischen Urteilstafel" (Dissertation, Rostock, 1932), 27. A key passage for understanding Kant's strategy is his distinction between "principle" and "theorem" at A737=B765; an especially helpful exegesis of this passage is given in A. Genova, "Kant's Notion of Transcendental Presupposition in the First *Critique*," in *Essays on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. J. Mohanty and R. Shahan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 99–126.

2. *Prolegomena*, Ak. IV, 373 n.; judgments of pure mathematics raise technical issues that I ignore here.

may appear at first glance curious for a philosopher with the reputation for forbidding difficulty that Kant has.³

I begin with what I call, for lack of better terms, Kant's "critical" or "dialectical" conception of the thinking and judging subject. Here we examine what is perhaps the central difficulty of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely, how subjective conditions can claim objective validity, or, to phrase the point differently, why conditions imposed by a subject must at the same time be regarded as universal and necessary. The task here is complicated by the ambiguity with which Kant employs the terms "subjective" and "objective," as well as their derivatives; further difficulties result from the fact that this issue, as much as any, compelled Kant to rewrite important parts of the *Critique*, which include some of the most impenetrable pages of that text. We see him, understandably, struggle with his characterization of the subject, and its role, in his published and unpublished writings between the two editions of the *Critique*; he continues to do so in those works (again, both published and unpublished) that occur after the *Critique's* second edition. Here, I will attempt to keep the account to a manageable scope by focusing on the relationship between the thinking subject and logic as given in the *Critique* itself, drawing on other texts only when necessary to clarify Kant's central claims relative to this relationship. The central claim to be argued here is that if a coherent model of the thinking and judging subject emerges from Kant's text (particularly from the Transcendental Deduction and Paralogisms of Pure Reason), then his conception of how this subject can, on reflection, identify a set of rules—a logic—relative to a given domain is largely defensible, as is Kant's insistence on the universality and necessity of those sets of rules for any relevantly similar agent. Indeed, Kant's account of logic—both general and transcendental—makes sense only for the kind of thinking and judging subject he considers. If successful, this would deflect the sting of one longstanding complaint against the Critical philosophy, its alleged extreme subjectivism.

Kant's analogy between general and transcendental logic provides

3. For historical details on Kant's relationship to the tradition of "common sense" philosophy, see Manfred Kuehn's *Scottish Common Sense in Germany, 1768–1800* (Kings-

the central thread tying together the arguments of the First *Critique*; the premises, arguments, and conclusions Kant offers, I believe, must be seen in light of this analogy. If that is the case, then what Kant himself means by "logic" must be clarified. This is not a particularly easy task, in that Kant himself uses the term in contexts where it is not entirely clear whether in employing the term "logic" he means general logic, transcendental logic, or some still more vague conception that includes both. The project is made still more complicated by the historical consensus that Kant's conception of general, or formal, logic is coextensive with Aristotelian syllogistic; as C. S. Peirce sums up this consensus, "we are to remember that, according to Kant, nothing worth mention had been contributed to logic since Aristotle," a view that one can find as easily in Hegel as in contemporary, and competent, histories of logic and philosophy.⁴ To clarify Kant's own conception of logic, so fundamental to the analogy we shall examine, I look at the manner in which Kant employs the notion of "logic," arguing that for Kant, general logic should not be interpreted along the lines of a contemporary formal model. For Kant, "logic" is employed to identify a set of conditions for thought in general—hence the term "*allgemeine* logic," used to indicate its universality—in a manner similar to Wittgenstein's usage in his *Tractatus-Logico-Philosophicus*.

I also look at Kant's notion of a "conceptual scheme"—a notion that I will return to, in discussing some of Donald Davidson's work—within the context of his view of natural language. Kant has consistently been taken to task, by critics of his day and our own, for having ignored the problem of natural language. The earliest, and still best-known, objection is that of J. G. Hamann, who argued that in attempting to "purify" reason, Kant neglected the most significant aspect of language, its contingent nature, a point that has been further developed by contemporary scholars. I will argue that, on the contrary,

ton [Ont.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987). Karl Ameriks has emphasized Kant's "broad and often unappreciated concern with common sense" in his recent *Kant and the Fate of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4. C. S. Peirce, *Elements of Logic* §39, in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931).

Kant is concerned with language, albeit at a logical or grammatical level, in his attempt to identify conditions necessary for judgments to take place in any language. Therefore, Hamann and his contemporary followers fail to recognize the relevance of Kant's approach for providing conditions of rational agency, or his contribution to the history of the search for a universal grammar. (I will sketch as well an abbreviated outline of the tradition of universal grammar that sheds a good bit of light on Kant's own account.) Hamann's mistake, I believe, continues to be registered by many contemporary philosophers who marvel at "Kant's well-known indifference to language."⁵ This discussion will then reinforce an earlier result of this study, namely, that on Kant's conception of logic, we reflectively discover a set of rules that are universally and necessarily binding on thought and cognition, although here in a specific linguistic context.⁶

I further provide some of the historical background and context of informing Kant's views, which will include both Stoic and Scholastic contributions to this history, including a brief look at the influential texts of the Port-Royal school, the significance of which must take into consideration not only the Port-Royal "logic" (*La Logique, ou l'Art de Penser*) but also the Port-Royal "grammar" (*Grammaire générale et raisonnée*). In the attempt to weave together these various influences on Kant's thought, we will discover that the almost canonical identification of Kant's logic with that of Aristotle is at best historically naïve, and has served as a serious obstacle to understanding the *First Critique*.

With a coherent conception of the relationship between the subject and a given set of rules, and a clearer philosophical and historical understanding of what Kant means by "logic," we take up one of the most controversial and debated aspects of Kant's project in the *Critique*, the *justification* of those rules, specifically the Analytic moment of Transcendental Logic. Here I will begin to explore the exegetical

5. H. Aarsleff, *From Locke to Saussure* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 11.

6. In this context, it is worth noting Beatrice Longuenesse's remark that for Kant, "no judgment (as psychological activity) can take place without linguistic expression" *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. C. Wolfe (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 100n47; cf. "Jäsche" *Logic* Ak. IX, 604-5.

details of Kant's arguments by examining the influence of Rousseau's thought on Kant, specifically in addressing the question of autonomy writ large. While there is now a century-long tradition recognizing the importance of Rousseau for Kant, I will argue, albeit briefly here, that this influence has been misconstrued within that tradition by focusing almost exclusively on Kant's practical (moral) philosophy. Instead, I will try to demonstrate that Rousseau's importance for Kant is at least as significant in the strategy Rousseau employs, a strategy grounded in the notion of self-legislation. While there are a number of historical antecedents in the development of this notion, I will argue that Rousseau's contribution plays the crucial role in how Kant goes about structuring his own arguments for justifying the rules of logic. I then turn to the text that is central to the relationship between General Logic and Transcendental Logic, the "Metaphysical Deduction." The difficulties here are manifold: Kant scholars have long argued about what, if anything, is established by this "deduction" and about whether it qualifies, even on Kant's language, as a "deduction"; even were we to grant that it does so qualify, it is not entirely clear how it differs from the much better-known Transcendental Deduction. Making things still worse, Kant uses the term "metaphysical deduction" only once, in the second edition of the *Critique* (at B159), although the *argument* to which the term purports to refer is in both editions; not surprisingly, where the argument even *is* has been the matter of some debate.

A now-traditional reading of the metaphysical deduction, as given by Schopenhauer and Jonathan Bennett, among many others, sees Kant as beginning with a set of judgment-forms, from which he then develops ("hacks and wrenches," in Bennett's colorful terminology)⁷ a corresponding set of categories with that earlier table in mind. He can then claim to have *derived* the table of categories from the table of judgments, both of which he views as complete, universal, necessary, and so on. On this interpretation, the metaphysical deduction becomes an indefensible and arbitrary construct, owing too much at once to both

7. Kant's "favoured dozen" judgment-forms "serve throughout the *Critique* only as a Procrustean bed on which he hacks and wrenches his philosophical insights into a grotesque 'system,'" *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966),

89. The image is originally Schopenhauer's.

the Aristotelian tradition and Kant's own unwavering loyalty to his architectonic, a view that has been vigorously challenged by Klaus Reich, Reinhardt Brandt, and others. Here I also challenge this reading, from a somewhat different direction, by looking at the table of judgments in light of the history of logic earlier sketched, by calling into question the very notion that Kant "derives" the table of categories from the table of judgments, and by offering an alternate interpretation of Kant's notorious claim that the two tables are "complete."

I then turn to some issues where Kant's Critical philosophy engages topics of contemporary interest. I first take up Laurence Bonjour's recent work, where he argues that without some kind of commitment to the *a priori*—which Bonjour develops into a program he calls "moderate rationalism"—we risk "giving up rational thought altogether." I argue that on the basis of Bonjour's reading, he in fact fails to recognize Kant as providing the strongest arguments available for the *a priori*, and that Kant's results, which combine a correspondence theory of truth and a coherentist theory of knowledge and experience, are strikingly similar to Bonjour's own results. Yet Bonjour, I think, fails to see that the strategy he adopts, which appeals, at best, to strong inductive arguments, is not sufficient to provide the conclusions he needs.

I then return to an earlier point, to consider whether Kant's conception of logic can be seen as a conceptual framework, imposed by a thinking and judging subject, that yields a set of rules providing minimal, albeit universal and necessary, constraints for the possibility of meaningful thought and for possible experience. Employing the very notion of a "conceptual scheme" is, of course, itself fraught with controversy; here I simply hope to show that a Kantian "conceptual scheme" or "framework," as construed here, both is unavoidable and does not succumb to the standard kinds of objections in contemporary analytic philosophy, particularly those raised by Donald Davidson. As Davidson remarks about his own work, "Kant's influence has been the most pervasive, but it runs so deep that I have seldom acknowledged it in print."⁸ Davidson has argued, famously, that the no-

8. Donald Davidson, "Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. L. E. Hahn (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1999), 64.

tion of alternate conceptual schemes is incoherent in its reliance on an ill-posed contrast between organizing scheme and a "given" content to be organized; consequently, the "very idea" of a conceptual scheme is itself untenable.⁹ Davidson argues: "We have found no intelligible basis on which can be said that schemes are different. It would be equally wrong to announce the glorious news that all mankind—all speakers of language, at least—share a common scheme and ontology. For if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one."¹⁰

It is not entirely clear that this is a result Kant would reject; indeed, on one reading, it is one he not only would embrace, but in fact argued for in his own work. At the same time Kant would add that certain notions, or principles, or rules—no doubt including those originally articulated in the table of judgments—would have to be presupposed even to get the kind of background agreement Davidson relies on to get his argument off the ground, although they would be discoverable only reflectively. Such a set of rules, of course, Kant characterizes as a "logic." The point is that an agent who rejects all principles—that is, who fails to adopt any principle that could be characterized as such a principle of logic—could not qualify, on Kant's view, as rational. The principles at issue here, then, serve as candidates for being necessary—and not sufficient—conditions of rationality. The question that arises is this: in attributing agency to another, must we attribute some set of minimal logical constraints on meaning and communicability, and, if so, can they be satisfactorily identified? Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that this claim functions as a *normative* constraint on reason; frequently agents are, in fact, inconsistent; frequently we commit the simplest mistakes in reasoning and unknowingly embrace contradictory or inconsistent beliefs. But when made cognizant of such mis-

9. The *locus classicus* of the view is D. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 183–98. Interestingly enough, Davidson elsewhere notes that, among others, Kant pursued his metaphysical inquiries by studying "the general structure of language"; "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics" in the same collection (199); my emphasis. See also Davidson, "The Second Person," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. P. French, T. Uehling, and H. Wettstein, vol. 17 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 255–67.

10. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 198.

takes, we have an intellectual obligation to eliminate the inconsistency.

Whether we choose to call this set of rules a "conceptual scheme" or not makes relatively little difference in this context, in that Kant is not contrasting such a logic or scheme with a given content, as are those Davidson criticizes. For Kant, the status of these rules, as universal and necessary, or a priori, is unambiguous; here I will attempt to explicate how one might view such principles within the context of Davidson's own work, in short, what a Davidsonian account of a prioricity—if such a thing is not itself contradictory—would amount to. To be sure, Davidson's unwillingness to countenance the analytic-synthetic distinction, and any of the strong a prioricity required by Kant's approach, prevents Davidson from presenting a genuinely Kantian picture. At the same time, there seems to be no in-principle conflict between Davidson's identification of language-users with belief-holding agents and Kant's insistence that some minimal set of logical—in the sense of both general and transcendental logic—conditions is isolable and justifiable in that identification. In short, for Kant there is some core of beliefs that we must attribute to another if we are to recognize that other as an agent under any sufficiently complex description. I argue here that there may be reasons for seeing that Davidson ultimately cannot avoid introducing some such element into his program, particularly in light of his later work, where he develops a "triangulation" strategy in characterizing the relationship among two agents and a shared stimulus.¹¹

I then look, all too briefly, at those philosophers who have influentially argued that most, if not all, of the traditional commitments of the Enlightenment—necessity, truth, and objectivity among them—need to be eliminated as philosophical goals, and we must rather remain content with the thoroughgoing "postmodern" embrace of ge-

11. An anonymous reader of an earlier version of this material put it well: what is needed here is a way "to tease apart the Kantian and the Quinean elements in Davidson's work," in terms of radical interpretation, agency, and rationality. There seem to be, and certainly are on Kant's view, in-principle limits in characterizing these notions. From that perspective, it becomes difficult to countenance Quine's well-known claim that "no statement is immune to revision," and it is more than simple "logic-chopping" to ask how one might in fact revise this statement itself. See "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 43.

nealogy, convention, and ideology. Looking specifically at a fragment of the work of Michel Foucault, I argue that the reading Foucault and others have proposed fails to conceptualize Kant's results in the *logical* way Kant presents them, and thus the postmodern critique of Kant either attributes to Kant positions he in fact rejects or is forced to adopt the *logical* thrust of his transcendental strategy to avoid a crippling relativism or skepticism.

I conclude this study by tying together its various elements—historical, exegetical, and contemporary—in a relatively brief summary, arguing that Kant's results, while immoderate in the sense that they propose universal and necessary constraints on rationality, must also be seen, in terms of what these arguments establish, as modest. We can regard, in spite of Davidson's important and suggestive objections, Kant's logic—the legitimate rules of general logic and transcendental analytic—as a conceptual scheme, imposing a set of unyielding, invariant synthetic concepts and principles employed *a priori*. But these concepts and principles must be regarded as providing the conditions of possible thought and experience and as fixing the limits within which they occur.¹² The structure Kant argues for in the *Transcendental Analytic*, and the exposure in the *Transcendental Dialectic* of the errors of attempting to transcend the limits imposed by that structure (along with those of the *Aesthetic*), is for many difficult enough to accept. Any "defense" of Kant's project becomes hopeless if his conceptual scheme is taken as establishing anything more than formal conditions for the possibility of thought and experience, or worse, if formal conditions are taken as establishing substantial, material conclusions about the content of that experience. Thus, I think we must regard that conceptual scheme as immodest yet minimal—immodest in establishing absolutely universal and strictly necessary conditions for the possibility of experience, yet as such imposing only a minimal framework within which questions of science, mathematics, and empirical experience are investigated. As Arthur Melnick has succinctly stated, "at least part of Kant's empirical realism is that everything is 'left open' that

12. See *Prolegomena*, Ak. IV,352, where Kant distinguishes *Schranken* from *Grenzen*.

could be left open," where "left open" is construed as "undecideable on a priori grounds or not in any way contributed by the subject."¹³ As I hope to have shown, the interpretation of Kant's project along the lines given in what follows makes that project considerably more attractive, and of considerable more relevance, than its current reception in contemporary philosophy would indicate.

13. Arthur Melnick, *Kant's Analogies of Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) 156.